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# Protagonist-Antagonist Dichotomy in Palestinian Children's Literature

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## Abstract

Title: Protagonist-Antagonist Dichotomy in Palestinian Children's Literature

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This essay is a study in protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Palestinian children's literature depicting encounters between Palestinians and Israelis. The interest in such a study is to evaluate whether the characterization consistently depicts the protagonists and the antagonists and their relation towards each other in a similar manner. If that is the case the literature risks promoting stereotyping and labeling of certain groups of people. A set of eight factors were established in accordance with a Spanish study with the English title *Evaluation of the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Spanish television content targeting children* in order to assess the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy. The factors were: type, age, skills, nationality, relationship between the protagonist and antagonist, portrayal of the characters, means used to achieve objectives and consequences of the action towards the antagonist and vice versa. It was found that in the depiction of the protagonist the characters carried many similar traits but were still depicted with personalities and a sense of humanness. The portrayal of the antagonist characters were on the other hand close to identical and did neither represent personalities nor the complexity of a human being.

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# Table of Content

1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 OBJECTIVES.....	6
1.2 CRITERIA.....	6
1.3 DEFINITIONS.....	6
1.3.1 Protagonist.....	6
1.3.2 Antagonist.....	6
1.3.3 Qualitative Study.....	7
1.4 DELIMITATION.....	7
1.5 METHOD & MATERIAL.....	7
2 BACKGROUND.....	11
2.1 PALESTINE FROM 1917 TO 2011.....	11
2.2 WHAT DOES CHILDREN’S LITERATURE HAVE TO DO WITH IT?.....	12
2.3 THE STORIES.....	14
2.3.1 Checkpoints.....	14
2.3.2 Rashā’s Window.....	14
2.3.3 The Helicopter.....	15
2.3.4 Will My Father Come Back?.....	15
3 ANALYSIS.....	17
3.1 TYPE AND AGE.....	17
3.1.1 Protagonist.....	17
3.1.2 Antagonist.....	17
3.2 NATIONALITY.....	17
3.2.1 Protagonist.....	17
3.2.2 Antagonist.....	18
3.3 GENDER.....	18
3.3.1 Protagonist.....	18
3.3.2 Antagonist.....	18
3.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PROTAGONIST AND THE ANTAGONIST.....	18
3.5 PORTRAYAL OF THE CHARACTERS.....	19
3.5.1 Protagonist.....	19
3.5.2 Antagonist.....	19
3.6 MEANS USED TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES.....	19
3.6.1 Protagonist.....	19
3.6.2 Antagonist.....	20
3.7 CONSEQUENCES OF THE ACTIONS.....	21
3.7.1 Protagonist.....	21
3.7.2 Antagonist.....	22
3.8 SKILLS.....	22
3.8.1 Protagonist.....	22
3.8.2 Antagonist.....	22
3.9 OTHER STUDIES.....	23

4 DISCUSSION .....	24
5 CONCLUSION .....	27
6 WORKS CITED.....	28
6.1 SOURCE MATERIAL .....	28
6.2 LITERATURE .....	28
7 APPENDIX .....	31
7.1 TRANSLITERATION KEY .....	31

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Objectives

The objective of this essay is to carry out a qualitative study of protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Palestinian children's literature depicting Palestinian-Israeli encounters by assessing the protagonist's and antagonist's type, age, skills, nationality, relationship between the protagonist and antagonist, portrayal of the characters, means used to achieve objectives and consequences of the action towards the antagonist and vice versa.

## 1.2 Criteria

- A Palestine-Israel encounter must clearly emerge from the stories.
- The primary projected reader is a Palestinian child.
- The protagonist must correspond to the definition of protagonist posed under 2.3 *Definitions – 2.3.1 Protagonist*
- The antagonist must correspond to the definition of antagonist posed under 2.2 *Definitions – 2.3.2 Antagonist*

## 1.3 Definitions

### 1.3.1 Protagonist

“The chief character in a dramatic work. Hence, in extended use: the leading character, or one of the main characters, in any narrative work, as a poem, novel, film, etc.”<sup>1</sup>

### 1.3.2 Antagonist

“In literature, the principal opponent or foil of the main character, who is referred to as the protagonist, in a drama or narrative. The word is from the Greek *antagōnistēs*, “opponent or rival.””<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Protagonist,” <http://www.oed.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/Entry/153105?redirectedFrom=protagonist#eid> (accessed May 7, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “Antagonist,” <http://www.britannica.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/EBchecked/topic/26928/antagonist> (accessed May 07, 2012).

### 1.3.3 Qualitative Study

The definition of a qualitative study is taken from the book *Computer-assisted Text Analysis* where it is referred to as “inductive, non-statistic and exploratory”<sup>3</sup> further the author has listed 14 different approaches within the qualitative study towards the text that is being examined. In this study the approach that is being adopted is the “characteristics of language with regards to its content”.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.4 Delimitation

Children’s literature is a big and general term for many different forms of literature. Not only does it comprises a wide range of genres but is also dependent on the age of the projected reader.<sup>5</sup> In this essay the literature that is being subjected to the study is targeting readers between 6 and 13 years. This age-group might be perceived as wide, it is however established in accordance with the publishing institute Tamer Institute for Community Education.<sup>6</sup> Noteworthy is also that a big quantity of images is found in the studied material, which in no sense is less important than the text. These will not however be analyzed in this specific essay since that is an area worthy of a full Bachelor essay in itself. Therefore the analysis will be limited solely to the text in the material.

### 1.5 Method & Material

This study is aiming to analyze literature projected for a specific reader, Palestinian children. The possibility of finding children’s literature written primarily for Palestinian readers is within the borders of Sweden limited thus a categorization of this kind is to say the least problematic. Tamer Institute for Community Education is, if not the only, one of few Palestinian publishers whose children’s literature is imported to Sweden. Their outspoken agenda of working in the Palestinian society for the Palestinian people contributed to the decision to base this study on their literature.<sup>7</sup> The children’s books that will be part of this study is partly a result of what is to be found in Swedish libraries and bookshops but will also contain a number of stories from Tamer Institute for Community Education published on the

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<sup>3</sup> Roel Popping, ed., 2000, *Computer-assisted Text Analysis*, London: SAGE Publications, Ltd. Chap. Relation to Qualitative Research, <http://srmo.sagepub.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/computer-assisted-text-analysis/n8.xml> (accessed May 1, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Elise Seip Tønnessen “Practices of Reading: On Paper and Screen” in *Children’s Literature Global and Local: Social and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. Emer O’Sullivan, Kimberley Reynilds and Rolf Romøres (Oslo: Novus Press), 269.

<sup>6</sup> Tamer Institute for Community Education, *Annual Report 2010* (Ramallah: Tamer Institute for Community Education), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 4.



internet.<sup>8</sup> The initial material looked into was a corpus of around 7000 words in a total of 14 stories, listed below. The three stories marked with an star are all from the same book, cited as *Kitābî al-'awwal*. For full bibliography see paragraph 6 *Work Cited*.

Arabic title	English translation	English transliteration
1. يوم في الأحلام	A Day in the Dreams	Yawm fî al-'aḥlām
2. مذكرات أصيل	'Asil's Diary*	Mudhakarāt 'Aṣîl
3. أذن سوداء... أذن شقراء	Black Ear...Blond Ear	'Udhun sawdā'.. 'Udhun shaqrā'
4. الحواجز	Checkpoints*	'Al-ḥawājiz
5. صداقة ممنوعة	Forbidden Friendship	Sadāqah mamnū'ah
6. شباك رشا	Rashā's Window	Shubbāk Rashā
7. خطة سلمى	Salmā's Plan	Khaṭah Salmā
8. الخراف لا تأكل القطط	Sheep Do Not Eat Cats	'Al-khirāf lā t'akul al-qīṭaṭ
9. أول زهرة في الأرض	First Flower in the World	'Awwal zahrah fî al-'arḍ
10. زهرة النوم	The Flower of Sleep	Zahrah al-nawm
11. الطائرة	The Helicopter	'Al-tā'irah
12. القملة	The Louse	'Al-qumlah
13. مغني المطر	The Rain Singer	Mughannî al-maṭar
14. أبي، هل يعود؟	Will My Father Come Back?*	'Abî, hal y'aūd?

From these stories four have been picked out as they are considered fulfilling the criteria.

Hence the analysis contains of a text corpus of around 2000 words. The four stories are number 4. *Checkpoints*, number 6. *Rashā's Window*, number 11. *The Helicopter* and number 14. *Will My Father Come Back?* They have been translated with the help of the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*.

A similar protagonist-antagonist study has been carried out by Carmen López-Sánchez, Ph.D. from the University of Alicante, Victoria Tur-Viñes, Ph.D. from the University of Alicante and José A. García-Castillo, Ph.D. from the Miguel Hernández University, the study was initiated by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science and the FEDER. Cruz Alberto Martínez from the University of London has translated it with the English title *Evaluation of the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Spanish television content targeting children*.<sup>9</sup> The factors that were established in order to analyze the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Spanish children's television programs will be the same set of factors that I use in this study to analyze the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Palestinian children's literature. The factors are: type, number, age, gender, nationality, skills, relationship between the characters,

<sup>8</sup> Arab Cultural Trust, "Al-Hakawati," [http://www.al-hakawati.net/arabic/stories\\_Tales/baby3index.asp](http://www.al-hakawati.net/arabic/stories_Tales/baby3index.asp), (accessed February 4, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Carmen López-Sánchez, Victoria Tur-Viñes, and José A. García-Castillo, "Evaluation of the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Spanish television content targeting children," *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 65, (2010): 553-60, trans. Cruz Alberto Martínez, [http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/918\\_Alicante/40\\_TurEN.html](http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/918_Alicante/40_TurEN.html) (accessed May 7, 2012).

portrayal of the characters, means used to achieve objectives, consequences of the action of the protagonist over the antagonist and vice versa.<sup>10</sup> There will however be a difference in the methodology of the analysis. The analysis that was made in their study was enabled through the computer program SPSS (the Statistical Product and Service Solutions, version 12.0) and SPAD (Système Portable pour l'Analyse de Données version 4.5.) due to their large corpus of examination. I will not be using statistic computer programs for measuring the results as my text corpus is significantly smaller. I will nevertheless, similar to them, use Microsoft Excel, to create and present tables of some of the material.

The definitions for the protagonist and the antagonist are taken online from Oxford English Dictionary and Encyclopædia Britannica. The reason for them being taken from different source is that the definition for the antagonist in the OED was not specific for literary characterization and the definition for protagonist in EB was too long and not adequately specified.

A third set of literature will be *Keywords for Children's Literature* edited by Philip Nel and Lissa Paul. The book has the structure of an encyclopedia with the words arranged in alphabetic order and elaborated on in individual essays, written by expert within each field. *Children's literature New Approaches* by Karín Lesnik Oberstein contains a number of essays each with a topic within the field of children's literature, written by scholars on the subject. The last one is *I barnbokens värld* by Ingrid Nettervik, with a main focus on the historic transformation and genres of children's literature. These have been consulted in the writing of paragraph 2.2 *What does children's literature have to do with it?* and paragraph 3.9 *Other Studies* where they are used in the comparison of the results in this study with scholars' knowledge on the subject.

The structure of this essay is built as follows: The four stories singled out as relevant will be assessed on the eight factors mentioned above. The main focus will be put on the manifested content i.e. information clearly emerging in the text. If any of these factors are absent a reasonable estimation will be made, for example, if the age of the protagonist is not mentioned, but another indicator, such as the protagonist is in the first grade of school, a reasonable assumption will be that the protagonist approximately is 6 or 7 years old. If estimation is impossible or too unreliable this will also be commented on in the analysis. The analysis will be motivated with extracts from the text presented in tables. The following

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<sup>10</sup> Carmen López-Sánchez, Victoria Tur-Viñes, and José A. García-Castillo, "Evaluation of the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Spanish television content targeting children," *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 65, (2010): 553-60, trans. Cruz Alberto Martínez, [http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/918\\_Alicante/40\\_TurEN.html](http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/918_Alicante/40_TurEN.html) (accessed May 7, 2012), 555.

section of the analysis the results of the study will be compared to scholar's views on the subject and the Spanish study presented earlier. Paragraph 4 is a discussing paragraph where some general reflections of protagonist and antagonist depictions will be made and the results of the study will be further problematized and put in a bigger perspective. It will also be reconnected to the background text of the study. This is followed by a conclusion of the essay, a reference list of work cited and an appendix containing the transliteration key.

It should be noted that this study, as all studies in literature, is more or less subjected to interpretation of the individual performing it,<sup>11</sup> and someone making the same study might reach a different conclusion. I have nevertheless tried to eliminate the risk of ambiguous interpretations by mainly focusing on manifested content possible to retrieve from the text. Interpretation is also needed to some extent when it comes to translations from one language to another since a word in one language might carry different values than in another. With this being said I do not mean to make excuses but rather to regret any ambiguities that might appear.

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<sup>11</sup> Philip Pullman "Intention" in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York and London: New York University Press), 128-134.

## **2 Background**

Since this study is a study in Palestinian children's literature depicting Palestinian-Israeli encounters, this paragraph aims to shortly mention the encounters between Palestinians and Israelis that have been taking place through history. It will focus on the encounters from a Palestinian viewpoint since the literature that is to be analyzed is written from that perspective. A short text will introduce us to what children's literature has to do with it followed by a resume of the four stories that are being part of the study.

### **2.1 Palestine from 1917 to 2011**

In 1917 the Balfour declaration was written by Great Britain's foreign minister Arthur James Balfour where he promised to establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. 1922 the League of Nations placed the territory of Palestine under the administration of Great Britain and from that date large numbers of the Jewish population mainly from Eastern Europe started immigrating to Palestine. In 1937 violent clashes took place between the indigenous Palestinians and the newly immigrated settlers. Ten years later Great Britain decided, no longer in control of the situation, to turn over the responsibility of Palestine to the United Nations. This led to a resolution, dividing the land into two states, one Arab Palestine and one Jewish state.<sup>12</sup> Although the immigrated Jewish population was a clear minority they were offered 55% of the land. In 1948 Israel declared its independence which led to the first Israel-Arab war 1949 that ended in establishing the armistice border called the Green Line. Huge numbers of Palestinian refugees consequently fled to bordering countries.<sup>13</sup> After the second Israeli-Arab war 1967 Israel occupied the rest of the areas prescribed to the Palestinian people, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and a second wave of Palestinian refugees were forced to leave their homes. Since that time martial law has been applied in the occupied territories leading to around 650 000 imprisonments most of them without charges or trials for extensive periods of time, adults and children.<sup>14</sup> In 1974 the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to return, self-determination and national independence was reaffirmed by the General Assembly. Israel did not comply and persisted the occupation. In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon with the aim to eliminate PLO – Palestine Liberation Organization. Consequently a grand-scale massacre took place in the Palestinian refugee camps Sabra and Shatila in southern Lebanon. The First Intifada, the first big uprising in the West Bank, took

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations, "History of the Question of Palestine," (2012): <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/his.htm?OpenForm> (accessed April 21, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Graham Usher, introduction to *The West Bank wall Unmaking Palestine*, by Ray Dolphin (Chippenham and Eastbourn: Pluto Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

place in 1987 which led to a big loss of civilian Palestinian lives. Four years later in 1991 a peace conference was held in Madrid followed by the Oslo accords leading to mutual recognition between PLO and the Israeli government in extension leading to the creation of the Palestinian Council and the Palestinian Authority. In the year 2000 the Second Intifada broke out with the consequences of major damage and loss of life and property for the Palestinians, the Israeli occupation tightened its grip over the Palestinian territories and the construction of the West Bank wall started. The wall was constructed on the occupied land and included many of the settlements also built on occupied land. Both the settlements and the wall have been ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice. In 2006 the Palestinians went to ballot box to vote in a democratic election, surveilled by international actors. The democratic victory of Hamas in the election was invalidated and punished by the USA and Israel and they bestowed a siege on the Gaza Strip. Israel is today controlling all the borders, the airspace and the seashores of Gaza.<sup>15</sup> In 2008 Israel attacked the Gaza Strip in “Operation Cast Lead”,<sup>16</sup> a war on Gaza that harvested 1500 civilian victims, caused massive destruction of the infrastructure as well as the breaking of innumerable international laws. Israel also committed uncountable war crimes all investigated and acknowledged by the UN Human Rights Council, and can be read in their report *Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict*.<sup>17</sup> In 2006 there were more than 400 000 settlers living in the occupied West Bank and in East Jerusalem, only made possible through land confiscation and over 12,000 demolished Palestinian houses.<sup>18</sup> Today the settlers are counting more than half a million people and military checkpoint are on every 10<sup>th</sup> sq. km. The 23 of September 2011 is the official date that Palestine applied for the recognition of an independent state to the UN. In October the same year Palestine obtained a full membership in UNESCO.<sup>19</sup>

## **2.2 What does children’s literature have to do with it?**

Today there are children and grandchildren, generations of Palestinians who do not know what a life without the Israeli occupation looks like. This fact does of course affect every

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<sup>15</sup> Noam Chomsky, “Barack Obama and Israel-Palestine” in *Making the Future* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 133.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, “History of the Question of Palestine,” (2012): <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/his.htm?OpenForm> (accessed April 21, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Council. *Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict*. Advanced Edited Version. 12th sess., 2009,

<sup>18</sup> Graham Usher, introduction to *The West Bank wall Unmaking Palestine*, by Ray Dolphin (Chippenham and Eastbourn: Pluto Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, “History of the Question of Palestine,” (2012): <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/his.htm?OpenForm> (accessed April 21, 2012).

aspect of the Palestinians' lives and society. The essay you are now holding in your hand or reading on the screen of your computer, iPad, iPod, Blackberry or Android phone is the study on one of these effects. It is a study in the expression this reality takes in the literature directed to Palestinian children.

It is said that childhood is the period of an individual's life most crucial of forming the rest of it. It is the time we learn about the world and ourselves, how to interact with other people and the complex systems of society.<sup>20</sup> At the same time the importance of children's literature as affirming identity,<sup>21</sup> and render the world we live in intelligible has been acknowledged by scholars in the field.<sup>22</sup> Hence children's literature is used as a source of identification of self and others.<sup>23</sup> It is also suggested to have a therapeutic value among children experiencing traumatic events in their lives.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently the authors and publishers of children's literature are in a powerful position but also in a role of big responsibility.

The title of this study, *Protagonist and Antagonist Dichotomy in Palestinian Children's Literature*, indicates the focus of the essay. The interest of a protagonist-antagonist dichotomy study is to assess whether there is a pattern to be found in the way the characters are depicted. If a story consistently depicts a protagonist-antagonist relation the same way, it is lacking to promote a multifaceted picture of the world, which I would claim is a keystone when we are trying to look at and understand the globalized societies we are all a part of today. An overly simplistic picture can therefore be unbeneficial for the child and the society and shape the way they see the world in a harmful manner. So allow me to conclude this preface by a quote and a question:

“It is not what is said but the way it is said, and to whom it is said, which makes a book for children.”<sup>25</sup>

So, how is it said to Palestinian children?

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<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Parsons, “Ideology” in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York and London: New York University Press), 114.

<sup>21</sup> Karen Coats, “Identity” in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York and London: New York University Press), 111.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Parsons, “Ideology” in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York and London: New York University Press), 114.

<sup>23</sup> Ingrid Nettervik, *I barnbokens värld*, 2nd ed. (Malmö: Gleerups, 2002), 270.

<sup>24</sup> Hugo Cago, “Story” in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York and London: New York University Press), 211.

<sup>25</sup> Mike Cadden, “Voice” in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York and London: New York University Press), 225.

## 2.3 The Stories

### 2.3.1 Checkpoints

Is written by Fāṭimah Māḍī and Nībāl Māḍī two 12 year old Palestinian girls. The story is the second of three, published in the book *Kitābī al- 'awwal* which means my first book. It is the story about a boy with a mental disability who goes with his grandmother to the city. There he gets to pick out whatever he wants her to buy for him. On their way back to the village they live in is a checkpoint. The grandmother passes without visitation as she is an old lady. When the boy tries to pass the checkpoint without being searched the Israeli soldiers refuse to let him through. As the boy insists not to let them check his bag one of the soldier point his weapon in the child's face. The grandmother shouts to them to stop and that the boy is mentally disabled. The soldiers still insist to search his bag and the boy still refuses. One of the persons waiting in the line to cross the checkpoint takes the bag from the boy at the same time as another holds him back. When the soldiers look into the bag they are surprised to find two sandwiches and a packet of juice. Everyone laughs and the pride and happiness that the boy had felt for the gift from his grandmother is now gone, killed by the checkpoint and changed into sadness and humiliation.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.3.2 Rashā's Window

Is written by Tūbāsī 'Ablah. The story is narrated of a woman named Rashā and she tells us about the First Intifada when she was a young girl. One day when she was in school, the older students ran out on the street to join a protest. Rashā joined in although she was the youngest among them. By an accident she fell and broke her leg and until she recovered she was sitting by her window looking out on her friends playing on the street. One day when Rashā was sitting by her window she saw two Israeli cars driving into the neighborhood and the kids who were out playing started throwing stones at them. When the Israeli reinforcement was coming a girl in a red jacket, who was on the lookout, blew in a whistle pipe and in a few seconds all the children disappeared from the street. Shortly after the incident there was an Israeli jeep driving around Ramallah meaning to say that no one is allowed to enter the street and everyone must remain inside. But the message that they were shouting out war purposely distorted and was saying that the people are allowed on the streets until something else is indicated and disobedience will be punished. This is made purposely to confuse the people and if anyone enters the street they will get arrested. Rashā's friends went back out on the

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<sup>26</sup> Fāṭimah Māḍī and Nībāl Māḍī, "Al-ḥawājiz" in *Kātibī al- 'awwal* (Ramallah: Tamer Institute for Community Education, 2005).

street in front of her window. She, with her injured leg was as always sitting and watching them. A first Israeli jeep entered the street and the children faithful to their habit start throwing stones on the jeep, but Rashā could see further away two more jeeps heading towards her friends on the street. She then remembered the girl in the red jacket and as quickly as she could, with a broken leg, found a whistle pipe and blew in it to warn the kids on the street. They all heard it and disappeared from the street before the jeeps reached them.<sup>27</sup>

### **2.3.3 The Helicopter**

Is written by Zakaryā Muḥammad and is about a boy named 'Amjad. One day 'Amjad sees an Apache helicopter launch a missile on a building close to his house. The man who greets him every morning lives there and 'Amjad can hear his scream and he sees smoke coming out of the building. In the evening he goes to bed thinking about the man and he asks himself why they do not have a helicopter to attack the Israeli helicopter. During the night he has a nightmare, in the dream he throws a stone towards the helicopter but the stone does not reach it. The soldier inside the helicopter sees him and gets very angry and directs the machinegun of the helicopter towards 'Amjad. 'Amjad tries to escape but the soldier is following him everywhere and there is nowhere to hide. He wakes up by his own scream and his mother comes into his room and comforts him. She tells her son that it was only a bad dream and the soldier cannot touch him. The next day 'Amjad is still however scared of the helicopter and the soldier and stays at home thinking that if he goes to school the soldier will follow him. After school 'Amjad's friends come to visit him in the house. One of them gets the idea to make a kite of paper in the same color as the Palestinian flag. When they see the Apache helicopter appear in the horizon they raise the kite to the sky and it soars in the sky higher than the military helicopter. When 'Amjad sees the kite flying in the sky at the same time as a helicopter he forgets his fear and he feels safe again because he imagines that the kite is a helicopter protecting them from the Israeli military helicopter.<sup>28</sup>

### **2.3.4 Will My Father Come Back?**

Is written by Mona 'Abdullah 'Ahmad a 16 year old girl living in Gaza. Her story is the first of the three published in the book *Kitābî al-'awwal*. The story is about thirteen year old Waf'a who is living with her parents and four younger siblings. One evening Waf'a witnesses when the Israeli soldiers arrest her father and demolish their house. The mother, Waf'a and her

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<sup>27</sup> Tūbāsî 'Ablah, *Shubbāk Rashā* (Ramallah: Tamer Institute for Community Education, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Zakaryā Muḥammad, *Al-ṭā'irah* (Ramallah: Tamer Institute for Community Education, 2005).



siblings are left on the street without shelter. A neighbor invites them to live with her and a few days later the Red Cross comes to offer the family shelter in a camp for families with demolished houses. Waf'a remembers how her father once told her that education is the key to life under occupation and the only way to fight the enemies. So she goes back to the remnants of the house to find her school supplies and a picture of her father. Waf'a's mother tries to find out to what prison her husband has been taken and the Red Cross assists them in the search. After they have found the father and applied a dozen times they finally get permission to visit him. On their way to the prison their happiness is quickly exchanged for feelings of humiliation and inhuman treatment from the soldiers at the many checkpoints and visitations they have to pass. When the family finally reaches the prison they get to greet the father through a barbed wire fence and after a short while the father is taken back to his cell. Before disappearing totally Waf'a shouts to him, "Father, are you coming back?" he replies "Waf'a" whereby his voice disappears.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Munā 'A. 'Aḥmad," 'Abī hal y'aūd" in *Kātibī al-'awwal* (Ramallah: Tamer Institute for Community Education, 2005).

# 3 Analysis

The four stories resumed under paragraph 2.3 *The Stories* will here be assessed in the factors presented in the introduction of the essay – type, age, skills, nationality, relationship between the protagonist and antagonist, portrayal of the characters, means used to achieve objectives and consequences of the action towards the antagonist and vice versa.

## 3.1 Type and Age

### 3.1.1 Protagonist

Table 1. Type & Age:

Title:	Type:	Age: (Years)	Motivation:
Checkpoints	Child	12	Stated in the text
The Helicopter	Child	At least 6	He goes to school
Rashā's Window	Child	11-12	She is in the 5th grade
Will My Father Come Back?	Child	13	Stated in the text

### 3.1.2 Antagonist

Table 2. Type & Age:

Title:	Type:	Age: (Years)	Motivation:
Checkpoints	Soldiers	Likely 18-21	The age of mandatory military service in Israel <sup>30</sup>
Rashā's Window	Soldiers	Likely 18-21	The age of mandatory military service in Israel
The Helicopter	Soldier	Likely 18-21	The age of mandatory military service in Israel
Will My Father Come Back?	Soldiers	Likely 18-21	The age of mandatory military service in Israel

## 3.2 Nationality

### 3.2.1 Protagonist

Table 3. Nationality:

Title:	Nationality:	Motivation:
Checkpoints	Palestinian	He lives in a Palestinian village
Rashā's Window	Palestinian	She lives in Ramallah
The Helicopter	Palestinian	Stated in the text
Will My Father Come Back?	Palestinian	Stated in the text

<sup>30</sup> Jewish Virtual Library A Division of The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, "Israeli Defense Force (IDF) an Introduction," [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society\\_&\\_Culture/IDF.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/IDF.html) (accessed May 12, 2012).

### 3.2.2 Antagonist

Table 4. Nationality:

Title:	Nationality:	Motivation:
Checkpoints	Israeli	Stated in the text
Rashā's Window	Israeli	Stated in the text
The Helicopter	Israeli	Stated in the text
Will My Father Come Back?	Israeli	Stated in the text

## 3.3 Gender

### 3.3.1 Protagonist

The genders of the protagonists are in two of the stories females and in the other two they are males. This fact is indicated by the names and the way they are being addressed, in feminine singular in two of the stories and in masculine singular in two of the stories.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.3.2 Antagonist

In Arabic when applying plural to a group of people it is impossible to know if it is a mixed group with females and males or a male-only group which is the case in three of the four stories. It should however be noted that in all cases the word *soldier* is present in singular it appears in the masculine form, in other words they are presented as male soldiers when posing alone.<sup>32</sup>

## 3.4 The Relationship Between the Protagonist and the Antagonist

In all the four stories the protagonist relation to the antagonist is that of an innocent child versus occupation soldiers. It is also that of the power patters being favorable to the antagonist. They always have a physical advantage in the shape of guns, stun grenades, tanks and helicopter while the protagonist have nothing or at the most stones. Further the antagonist is always an adult while the protagonist is always a child as can be seen in table 1 and 2, a power structure that cannot be ignored. In three of the four stories the power relations are also occurring in the same pattern with consideration to the number, the protagonist is alone while the soldiers are many.

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<sup>31</sup> Eckehard Schulz, Gunter Khral and Wolfgang Reuschel, *Standard Arabic an Elementary - Intermediate Course*, English version ed. Eckehard Schulz, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 30-32.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

## 3.5 Portrayal of the Characters

### 3.5.1 Protagonist

In all stories the protagonist is a Palestinian child, always a victim, victim of injury, victim of losing a house and father, victim of fear, victim of sadness, a victim position that the occupation and the Israeli occupation soldiers are held responsible for. But at the same time as they are portrayed as victims they are also refusing the victimization through study harder, participating in the way they can despite injuries, refusing to obey and to overcome the fear for the soldiers. Noteworthy is also that they are depicted with the physical presence of a sole female guardian, in three cases the mother and in one the grandmother.

### 3.5.2 Antagonist

The antagonists are always presented in the shape of soldiers never posing as civilians or presented by proper names. They do not and will not, nor do they have to, stop, because of the power conditions, until they get their way. They are addressed as soldiers, military, enemies and bats of darkness.

## 3.6 Means Used to Achieve Objectives

### 3.6.1 Protagonist

The protagonists are in the stories primarily not depicted as actors but rather responders to actions directed towards them and the people around them. Therefore their objectives are rather to work against the antagonist objectives. This is done as seen by the tables containing extracts from the stories presented below, by demonstrations, stone throwing, refusing to obey and to study hard to refuse the occupation and the antagonists.

Table 5. Protagonist means used to achieve objectives in Checkpoints.

But the child refused to open the bag and put it behind his back	لكن الصبي رفض أن يفتح الكيس واضعا إياه خلف ظهره
The child's refusal increased	ازداد الطفل عنادا

Table 6. Protagonist means used to achieve objectives in Rashā's Window

I participated in a demonstration against the occupation	شاركت في مظاهرة ضد الاحتلال
They shout against the occupation and to release the prisoners	يهتفون ضد الاحتلال ويطلبون للأسرى
They throw stones on the soldiers	يرشقون الجنود بالحجارة

Table 7. Protagonist means used to achieve objectives in The Helicopter

He took a stone and threw it at the helicopter	أخذ حجرا ورماه على الطائرة
'Amjad escaped	هرب أمجد

Table 8. Protagonist means used to achieve objectives in Will My Father Come Back?

Your studies are the only key to life under occupation and the weapon to fight the enemy	دراستك هي مفنح الحية في الاحتلال وهي السلاح الوحيد الذي تحاربين به أعداءك
But I will work harder to prove that I was not the first child whose house they had destroyed, made their families refugees, imprisoned their parents or even made them martyrs.	لكني سأجهد أكثر مما كنت أفعل لكي أثبت أنني لست الأولى بين الأطفال الذين دمرت بيوتهم وتشردت علناتهم وأسر والدهم أو سقط شهيدا

### 3.6.2 Antagonist

The antagonists are depicted as the aggressors seen in the tables presented below. They are demolishing houses, strip-searching the protagonists. They are also shooting rubber bullets, deadly bullets, stun grenades and teargas at the protagonists as well as using armed threats and imprisonment.

Table 9. Antagonist means used to achieve objectives in Checkpoints.

The damned checkpoint in front of the entrance forced people to leave their cars and stand in a long line waiting for visitation	الحاجز اللعين المقام على مدخلها ، ويجبر الناس على النزول من سياراتهم ليصطفوا في صفوف طويلة انتظار التفقيش
The Israeli soldiers were waiting for him One of them tried visit and examine the content	كان الجنود الإسرائيليون له بالمرصاد. حاول أحدهم تفقيش وفحص محتوياته
The soldier insisted	أصر الجندي

Table 10. Antagonist means used to achieve objectives in Rashā's Window.

By military vehicles full with soldiers blocking our way	بسيارات عسكرية مليئة بالجنود تعترض طريقنا
The driver shot in the air	أطلق السائق عيارات نارية في الهواء
In the noise of bullets and exploding stun grenades and teargas	دوى الرصاص وتفجرت قنابل الصوت والغاز المسيل للدموع

Table 11. Antagonist means used to achieve objectives in The Helicopter

Apache helicopters bombed a building	قصفت طائرات الأباتشي العمارة
The rocket was launched from the plane	الصواريخ وهي تنطلق من الطائرة
Destroyed a house	تنسف بيت

Table 12. Antagonist means used to achieve objectives in Will My Father Come Back?

Killing, destruction, uprooting of trees and imprisoning of parents	قتل وتدمير وقلع للأشجار وأسر لأهله
Tanks passing by	مرور الدبابات
The speaker ordered evacuation of the house to demolish it	أطلقت مكبرات الصوت تأمر بإخلاء المنزل لهدمه
They put handcuffs on him	كبلوه بالأغلال.
They took your father.	أخذوا أبائك.
They are intending to imprison him	إنهم ينوون حبسه
My father between the hands of the bats of darkness the hits were raining over him	بأبي بين أيدي خفافيش الظلام تنهال عليه ضربا
They planted a bomb in the corner of the house	زرعوا قنابل في زوايا البيت

they took my father with them	أخذوا معهم أبي
Not the only child whose house they demolished whose family they had displaced whose father they had imprisoned or who had become a martyr.	لست الأولى بين الأطفال الذين دمرت بيوتهم وتشردت عائلاتهم وأسر والدهم أو سقط شهيدا
To see what the raping enemy had done	لأشاهد ما فعله العدو الغاصب
Whose houses the occupation had demolished and made them refugees in their own country	لمن دمر الاحتلال منازلهم وجعلهم لاجئين حتى في الوطن

### 3.7 Consequences of the Actions

#### 3.7.1 Protagonist

The consequences of the actions for the protagonist always come in the form of aggressive responses by the antagonist directed towards the protagonist. The reactions that are portrayed are armed threat, ultimatums, imposing curfew, humiliating treatments and violence seen in the tables presented below.

Table 13. Consequences of the actions of the protagonist over the antagonist in Checkpoints.

He pointed his weapon in the child's face	شهر سلاحه في وجه الصبي
The soldier insistence increased	أزداد الجندي إصرارا
The soldier made them chose between letting the child go back or to strip-search him	الجنود خيروهم بين إعادة الصبي أو إقناعه بتفتيش
The checkpoint killed the poor (child's) happiness	فرحة المسكين قتله الحواجز

Table 14. Consequences of the actions of the protagonist over the antagonist in Rashā's Window.

The answer came with rubber bullets and stun grenades and teargas	فجاء الرد بالرصاص المطاطي وقنابل الصوت والغاز المسيل للدموع
And again bullets and gas	وكذلك الرصاص والغاز
and all who disobey will be punished" (This is a real call, because Israel purposely distorts the Arabic language)	وكل من يخلف يعقوب" (العربية اللغة تشويه تقصد فالاسرائيل النداء حقيقة هذه)
Two (military) patrols for a few small children	دوريتان لبضعة أولاد صغار
The noise from bullets from the occupational soldiers	دوى رصاص جنود الاحتلال

Table 15. Consequences of the actions of the protagonist over the antagonist in The Helicopter.

The soldier got angry. Very angry	غضب الجندي كثيرا. غضب جدا
He directed the helicopter's machinegun on Amjad to shot him	صوب رشاش الطائرة نحو أمجد كي يطلق عليه النار
The machinegun directed towards him	الرشاش المصوب إليه
The soldier in the helicopter saw him through the window and shot	الجندي الذي في الطائرة رآه من الشباك وأطلق النار
The helicopter surrounds him and chases him everywhere	الطائرة تحاصره وتلاحقه في كل مكان
The helicopter follows him	تلاحقه الطائرة

Table 16. Consequences of the actions of the protagonist over the antagonist in Will My Father Come Back?

We asked for permission a dozens of times before they allowed us to visit him	قدمنا طلب زيارة عشرات المرات حتى سمح لنا بها
The enemy didn't allow our happiness to continue	لكن العدو لم يكمل فرحتنا
Strip-searching and provocations	التفتيش والاستفزاز
They stopped us at several places and checkpoints we faced humiliating and inhuman treatment	أوقفونا في عدة مواقع وحواجز تعرضنا للمعاملة المهينة وغير الإنسانية

### 3.7.2 Antagonist

In two of the stories *Rashā's Window* and *The Helicopter*, the protagonist attempts to outwit the antagonists through helping children to escape and to find a way to overcome fear for the antagonist, but no negative consequence directed towards the antagonist can be found in any of the stories.

Consequences of the actions of the antagonist over the protagonist in Checkpoints.  
No real consequences were found.

Table 18. Consequences of the actions of the antagonist over the protagonist in Rashā's Window

The stone throwing increased	ازداد رشق الحجارة
I jumped towards the whistle pipe without crutches I took it and returned to my place and with all the air that I could I blew in the whistle pipe the children scattered (and hid) like magic	قفزت نحو الصافرة دون عكاوز تناولتها وعدت مكاني وبكل ما وسعت رئتي من هواء نفخت في الصافرة فتفرق الأولاد كفعل السحر

Table 19. Consequences of the actions of the antagonist over the protagonist in The Helicopter

When Amjad saw that his kite was higher than the soldiers helicopter the fear left his heart. The fear of the soldier and his helicopter did not come back	حين رأى أمجد أن طائرته أعلى من طائرة جندي ذهب الخوف من قلبه لم يعد يخاف من الجندي وطائرته
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Consequences of the actions of the antagonist over the protagonist in Will My Father Come Back? No real consequences were found.

## 3.8 Skills

### 3.8.1 Protagonist

No specific set of skills were prescribed any of the protagonists

### 3.8.2 Antagonist

No specific set of skills were prescribed any of the antagonists

### 3.9 Other Studies

The type and age of the protagonist is a child in the age of the targeted age group, 6-13 years, while the antagonist is always an adult, which is a common portrayal of protagonist-antagonist depiction according to the results found in the study presented in *Evaluation of the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Spanish television content targeting children*.<sup>33</sup> The relationship between the protagonist and the antagonist was always the same child-soldier relation with the power structure in favor of the antagonists. That result is opposing results from the Spanish study where the protagonist always was found in a favorable power position.<sup>34</sup> The portrayal of the antagonist was rather typically depicted i.e. simplified in the way that they were always predictably mean and ready to do anything to impose their mean objectives. The antagonists are more like a single personal trait making up a whole character.<sup>35</sup> The protagonists are instead complex, they express feelings, are flexible in their actions, visible by the way they always try to find new ways of dealing with or outwitting the antagonists. These two different types of characters are what is called flat and round, the former predictable and simple in their thoughts and actions while the latter is more complex, hence more like a real person.<sup>36</sup> The way the protagonist and the antagonist achieve their objects are a further portrayal of the flat and round character pattern. The antagonist tries to achieve it by violence and threats while the protagonist tries to study, demonstrate against and outwit the antagonist. What however is somewhat unusual in this literature in comparison with other children's literature is that the protagonist holds a more passive role in comparison to the antagonist. The protagonists are depicted merely as responders to actions taken against them.<sup>37</sup> The consequences of the protagonist's actions towards the antagonist are that the antagonist is following its predictable pattern of increased violence. Not in accordance with the Spanish study is however the consequences the antagonists face when carrying out their objectives against the protagonist, which in the stories in this study are no direct consequences.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Carmen López-Sánchez, Victoria Tur-Viñes, and José A. García-Castillo, "Evaluation of the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Spanish television content targeting children," *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 65, (2010): 553-60, trans. Cruz Alberto Martínez, [http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/918\\_Alicante/40\\_TurEN.html](http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/918_Alicante/40_TurEN.html) (accessed May 7, 2012), 555.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Jay Mechling, "Character" in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul, (New York and London: New York University Press), 31.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Hunt, "Children's Literature" in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York and London: New York University Press), 45.

<sup>38</sup> Carmen López-Sánchez, Victoria Tur-Viñes, and José A. García-Castillo, "Evaluation of the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Spanish television content targeting children," *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 65 (2010): 553-60, trans. Cruz Alberto Martínez, [http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/918\\_Alicante/40\\_TurEN.html](http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art3/918_Alicante/40_TurEN.html) (accessed May 7, 2012) 557.



## 4 Discussion

In this paragraph the results will be further problematized and put in a bigger context by a discussion on the protagonist and antagonist found in this study but before that I will present some critical reflections on the general protagonist-antagonist depiction in all kinds of children's fiction. First I would however like to stress that the four stories in this study are merely a small part of the literature published by Tamer Institute for Community Education and cannot be considered to represent all of their literature.

The general structure of children's literature being built around the good character, the protagonist, and the bad character, the antagonist could be considered problematic. If literature, and media in general, directed to children project the reality of the world as being black or white, where you either are a good person, or a bad person, we risks to promote a society viewing dissidents as opponents. And instead of trying to understand the reason that lays behind a person's act or thought, it will simply be perceived as if the person representing the act is "a rival". To have a starting point as seeing people with different mind sets than oneself as opponent instead of fellow humans is in my opinion dangerous. If we further add the common pattern of the antagonist being a flat character while the protagonist is a round character makes the structures even more problematic and is a way of "robbing" a character and possibly a human of its humanness. When it comes to the protagonist, part of the same problem is occurring although in the opposite direction. It might risk projecting a misleading picture of what it means to be a human in the sense that the protagonist generally ends up in the "winning" position at the end of the story. They also usually get the antagonist to either by "force" or voluntarily change to the "right path". This will project a picture of people who are different from oneself as wrong and that they will change if you only show them or impose how they should behave and think. That the antagonist may believe in what he is doing and that there is not forcibly one right and one wrong side, I would argue is important to promote. Portraying characters as either right or wrong is problematic and does not give a just picture of the reality. I would even claim that it is directly harmful for a person and a society to look at the reality through that perspective and that kind of depiction risk to promote a dogmatic mind set.

By that being said let us now return to the political situation presented under 2.2 *Palestine from 1917 to 2011*. If we are to look at the political reality in the area, there are two more or less plausible scenarios for the future widely debated in political and academic settings. Either a two-state solution as a result of the application handed in to the UN in

September 2011, or a one-state solution as a result of drastic changes in the region. In the case of a two state solution as well as in that of a one state solution it is realistic to think that the people, today holding a Palestinian ID and the people holding an Israeli one, one day need to coexist and to some extent cooperate. However complicated and hard it might be to imagine for many people at the present, considering the oppression the Israelis daily are subjecting the Palestinians to. What has led to this oppression is a long and socially complex history but what is allowing one human being to oppress another human being, as we have seen throughout history is to prescribe a certain group of people a specific identity and to demonize this group, or as Professor Noam Chomsky is putting it, making them into “unpeople”.<sup>39</sup> This “unpeople-ization” has been taking place in different societies and times towards different groups of people. It allowed the slave trade with its peak through the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>40</sup> and the treatment of the indigenous people living in the colonized states during the colonial era.<sup>41</sup> This is where the Palestinian children’s literature comes into the picture. Although many of us would understand why the Israelis, after more than 60 years of maintaining occupation of Palestinians, are depicted as they are, especially in the books written by a child and from a child’s perspective. It is however somewhat problematic to write complex stories about a subject such as occupation but simplifying some of the characters, i.e. flat characterization. As mentioned earlier, flat characters are not problematized and they do not need reasons for their actions, they simply are the actions that they do. In other words they tend to simplify the complexity of what it means to be a human. This is how stereotypes and demonization of people are created. If this is the only characterization of one group of people that is offered to Palestinian children and they in the future are to live in a society with this group and to see them as fellow humans this characterization could be important to readdress. It could be useful to elaborate on the characters as to why they are acting in a certain way or what is going on in their minds as well as offer a wider spectrum of personalities. It is important not to allow one group of the society in these stories young, male, oppressor, to represent the whole society and to build stereotypes through giving these attribute to five million people without showing the complexity of them. This does not mean to accept unfair treatment from Israeli soldiers or civilians but maybe to some extent understand it.

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<sup>39</sup> Noam Chomsky, “Nuclear Threats All Options Are one the Table,” *Making the Future* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 95.

<sup>40</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “Slave Trade,” <http://www.britannica.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/EBchecked/topic/548245/slave-trade> (accessed May 07, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “Colonialism,” <http://www.britannica.com/ludwig.lub.lu.se/EBchecked/topic/640195/West-Indies/54381/European-exploration-and-colonialism-1492-1800> (accessed May 07, 2012).

Finally I would like to say that the discussion above concerning the antagonist is in any case on a speculative level as there at the moment is neither a one- nor a two-state solution. Something more urgent and what I would consider is of utter importance is to do a similar research on the Israeli children's literature and the depiction of the Palestinians. For the simple reason that they are at this stage the oppressors and the stereotyping from their side pose a bigger threat to more human lives. They are affecting the lives of the Palestinians through maintaining the occupation and through daily meetings in checkpoints and prisons where they through their arms and military authority are in a favored power position.

## **5 Conclusion**

In the introduction of this study it was stated that the objectives are to carry out a qualitative study of the protagonist-antagonist dichotomy in Palestinian children's literature depicting Palestinian-Israeli encounters. The focus was mainly put on the manifested content in the literature when it came to assessing eight factors that were to be investigated. Four criteria were presented and definitions of protagonist, antagonist and of qualitative study of characteristics of language with regards to its content were offered. This was followed by a presentation of the literature and methodology that was to be used. Finally the analysis was carried out. The result that was found was that the type and age of the protagonist is a child in the age of the targeted age group, 6-13 years, while the antagonists were adults. The relationship between the protagonist and the antagonist was always the same child-soldier relation with the power structure in favor of the antagonists. The antagonists were mean and ready to do anything to impose their mean objectives and they also tried to achieve their objectives by violence and threats while the protagonists try to study, demonstrate against and outwit the antagonist. The protagonists are further depicted merely as responders to actions taken against them i.e. reactors. The consequences of the protagonist's actions over the antagonist are that the antagonists increase their violence while the consequences of the antagonist's actions over the protagonist in the stories are no direct consequences. The results that can be concluded are that that in the depiction of the protagonist the characters carried many similar traits but were still depicted with personalities and a sense of humanness. The portrayal of the antagonist characters were on the other hand close to identical and did neither represent personalities nor the complexity of a human being.

In the discussion of the study problems of the general depiction of protagonist-antagonist relationships in children's literature as well as the particular depiction of the protagonist-antagonist relationships found in the analyzed material was discussed. It can be concluded that a simplistic and consequent characterization of a specific group of people might lead to stereotyping and demonization of this group. That in turn will lead to children's literature promoting a view on the world in a misleading manner. Finally it was indicated that it could not only be interesting but also important to perform a similar study on Israeli children's literature in order to assess the protagonist-antagonist relation and the depiction of Palestinians.

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# 7 Appendix

## 7.1 Transliteration Key

English trans-literation	Arabic
ā	ا, آ
b	ب
t	ت
th	ث
j	ج
ḥ	ح
kh	خ
d	د
dh	ذ
r	ر
z	ز
s	س
sh	ش
ṣ	ص
ḍ	ض

English trans-literation	Arabic
ṭ	ط
ẓ	ظ
‘	ع
gh	غ
f	ف
q	ق
k	ك
l	ل
m	م
n	ن
h	ه
w, ū	و
y, î	ي
ah	ة
’	ء